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ABSTRACT

Twenty-four characteristics of effective leaders are described as an aid in helping others become effective student activities directors. It is stated that leaders are made, not born; leadership must be learned from experience, not from a textbook; and one must build on successes and learn from mistakes. Among the characteristics of effective leaders which are discussed are motivation; innovation; creativity; discipline; tact; compromise; flexibility; charisma; sympathy/empathy; confidentiality; sense of humor; and possession of good communication, conflict mediation, and human relations skills. (DC)

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The Characteristics of a Student Activities Director

Dr. Teena Hughs

When talking or thinking about leadership, we find that leadership is a subject that can be discussed from a variety of angles. This is because no one style or type of leadership fits all of us as student activities directors. Each one of us has a different style of leadership.

The old saying that "leaders are born" has been proven false. In fact, the only trait that you are born with that may be related to leadership is intelligence, and researchers aren't even sure how closely related it is to your effectiveness as a leader.

Of course, certain other traits have been linked to leadership; but, if these traits are going to be effective, they have to be meaningfully related to the nature and purposes of the group you are trying to lead. Therefore, we must learn as much as we possibly can about our total job situation if we are going to be effective leaders.

Then comes the question, "How do we become leaders?" From the time we are born we have examples of leadership to follow with our parents. As we grow older, we have other models to pattern our style of leadership after--Sunday School teachers, scout leaders, coaches. And then, we also become involved in leadership roles ourselves as we get more involved with clubs and organizations in and out of school. And, as we become more involved, we start developing our leadership patterns.

Now, leadership is something that is not learned from a textbook. We can learn about different styles and types of leadership from various textbooks and classes; but, we won't ever become effective leaders until we start practicing leadership and working on developing our own distinctive leadership style.

As student activities directors, we are faced with a great variety of situations

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daily from very funny to very serious. How we handle these situations is going to determine our effectiveness. If you build on your successes and learn from your mistakes, you will be improving yourself and your leadership ability.

Therefore, today, I would like to discuss some of the characteristics that I believe will help you become an effective student activities leader.

1. Know yourself

-----Know your strong points and go with them

-----Know your weaknesses and try to improve on them

-----Make a list of your strong and weak points and examine them

-----Do not emulate another person (especially the former Student Activities Director)

-----Be yourself, use your own personality

2. Know who you are working with and for--students, faculty, and administration

-----Keep an ear to the desires of administration, students, and faculty while remembering that you are an administrator.

-----At the same time you want to give the students the feeling that all of the college is rowing in the same direction.

-----The ultimate goal is to produce student, faculty, and administration satisfaction.

-----How do you know what they want?

a. Surveys--newspapers, public opinion polls, teacher's meetings
b. Group meetings--Senate meetings, club meetings
c. Welcoming suggestions--create an atmosphere that people will offer suggestions

-----You need to know how far you can go without getting your hand slapped.

3. Motivation

-----Without motivation

a. job won't get done
b. job won't improve
c. program will go down, not progress

d. won't have a lot of the characteristics necessary to be a successful activities director
e. will not satisfy yourself or the people you are serving

-----Motivation is an absolute necessity if you are going to succeed. Be excited about your job.

4. Innovative--change agent

-----After you know the needs and desires of all of the people you are working with, you can prepare to make changes to meet the needs of everyone.

-----Try to make changes that will create interest on your campus

-----a. Diagnose a need for a change
b. Develop or select an innovation (a method for changing)
c. Orient the target group to the proposed change
d. Anticipate problems and resistance to the proposed change
e. Develop and implement a plan to introduce the innovation and to overcome obstacles and resistance to change
f. Evaluate the implemented innovation and make needed refinements

-----Whether or not you are going to be effective as a change agent depends on the extent of the vision of changes that need to be brought about in your program--need to examine your abilities and willingness to commit yourself to make successful changes.

-----The proposed change should have the potential for improving the activities program before it can be considered desirable because as we all know, "change for change's sake" is not a valid or constructive goal.

5. Creative

-----New ideas for activities

-----a. preparing for activities, decorations
b. names for activities, contests
c. publicity

-----By being creative and trying new things that you really believe will create interest at your school will also get you a lot of good attention.

-----By trying new ideas (such as spur of the minute activities that only take a few minutes to run) sometimes get students involved that normally wouldn't get involved.

6. Discipline--control

-----Our jobs are centered around the fun things but there comes a time when they have to understand that fun and games have to be put aside and that you mean business

-----When you have to be the "toughie", it is hard and it can be very frustrating

-----They must know that you are in charge and when it is time to have fun and when it is time to be serious.

-----Follow rules - they will expect it

7. You're Human Too!!!

-----We all need to be patient, and we all try...but

-----Even when you are tired, to the limit, your students expect you to be all smiles--then when you get irritated and lose your patience, they have to understand that you are human too.

-----When you make a decision that isn't popular but you definitely know it is in the best interest of everyone, they have to understand that you can't always do things the way they want them done.

-----Everyone makes mistakes, and so do student activities directors.

-----Can't satisfy everyone but we will do our best.

8. Tact

-----Telling students to
   a. mind their own business
   b. take a bath
   c. quit kissing in the Student Center
   d. act properly

-----Don't tell it like it is, learn to tell them in a caring, sincere manner.

-----Try to develop a bedside manner.

9. Compromise

-----Sometimes this is very difficult but it is so necessary in dealing with students, faculty, and administration.

-----Often the success of your program or an activity will depend on your ability to compromise.

-----Sometimes students really want something while faculty or administration doesn't--through compromise, the students may get something very similar to what they want while still pleasing administration.

-----You will be so far ahead of yourself if you can learn the art of compromise--people will learn that you are willing to work with them and then you will be able to get so much more accomplished.

-----At some point we want to hold firm and it is a necessity to do so; but, if there is the slightest chance for compromise, consider it before it is totally vetoed.

-----Relate to the desires of all of the students, from recent high school graduates to older students, various ethnic groups. To do this, you need to get them to compromise and to nonverbally communicate that you care for all of them when you don't give them all that they want.

10. Flexibility

-----Leadership must change with the times and it is necessary to anticipate what lies ahead. The types of leadership roles being used now may have served well in the past and may serve well in the future; but, they may not.

-----Be flexible, what worked with one group may not work with another--last year's senate as opposed to this year's.

-----Be flexible with activities
a. some need to go
b. try new ones--target your groups who will profit by the activity

11. Charisma--persuasiveness

-----With a certain amount of charisma, you can persuade anyone to do anything.

-----This is a quality that few people possess in any remarkable degree.

-----This is a magnetic quality that once you have it, you can get any and everything done with your students, faculty and administration.

-----Excitement is a good characteristic of charisma--if you are excited about something, it is catching, the domino effect.

-----Recognize the qualities of those who will do the jobs for you. After they accept responsibility, always have them carry out their responsibilities and see that tasks are performed.

12. Good listener

-----Have to listen to so much from the students--personal problems, stories about teachers, etc., etc., etc. It doesn't matter how trivial.

-----Sometimes the problems are very serious though and may need to be handled by another professional more qualified to help.

-----It may be necessary to help students get professional help.

-----It is so important to be a good listener because sometimes these students just need someone to listen to them.

-----You find that you can listen and do something else at the same time.

13. Sympathy-empathy

-----This needs to be watched--sometimes you can sympathize too much when you need to be empathizing.

-----When you empathize you see the problem more clearly and can help a student more.

-----Sometimes you can't help but sympathize and there is nothing wrong with that at all, just don't let it drag you down.

14. Confidentiality

-----This is often difficult when you see and hear so many sides of these students' problems.

-----Even so, it can get you into trouble--they expect you to tell something you know or they expect you to keep quiet and you know that if you could tell what you know that it would clear the air.

15. Keeping mouth shut

-----This is so hard, especially when students' ideas seem so absurd.

-----When you see someone doing something you think is harmful or morally wrong, it is difficult to keep your mouth shut.

-----It is difficult to remember that most of our students are adults.

16. Sense of humor

-----needed to help you with situations

-----many times it is better to laugh something off than to make a big deal out of something

-----will be more appreciated and respected if you aren't always serious and can laugh at a practical joke.

-----be willing to participate (dunking booths, crazy contests)

17. Be a communicator

-----be friendly--have an open door policy

-----by trying to communicate with the people you work with, you can solve problems--let them know that they can come in and talk to you without your getting upset at them. Oftentimes situations can be resolved before they turn into problems if you can communicate.

-----keep up on what is going on in the world--sports, political events, religious issues, music, television shows, movies, etc.

-----helps you communicate with your students--doesn't put you on a different level from them

-----helps you stay young

18. Get used to no privacy

-----While I do advocate an open door policy, it can sometimes turn into something frustrating---office full of people
people feeling like it is their office and they just walk in on you when they want to whether you are busy or not
"I don't see how you get any work done."
"She never does anything."

-----Makes you want to get tacky and tell them you would get something done if they would all clear out of your office.

19. Manager

-----Budget

-----Planning activities and travel programs and speaker series

-----Clubs--getting them organized

20. Conflict mediator

-----personal situations, activities, administration, faculty, etc.

-----(1) secure all facts in the situation
-----talk to all witnesses
(2) secure perceptions each party to the dispute has of one another and of the issues in conflict
(3) goal is for each side to recognize some validity in the other party's position so that compromise can take place and the conflict can be resolved
(4) needs to develop an understanding on each part that neither side is right and that some "give and take" will be necessary before the conflict can be resolved.

21. Human relations facilitator

-----meeting the needs of students

-----developing cooperative and harmonious relationship, as on achieving the productivity goals of the organization

-----high morale among everyone

-----humanistic school environment

-----working closely with students, faculty, administration

-----working with the community

22. One of our hardest tasks is to be able to like those people who are basically unlikable--develop the capacity for noticing some good quality in everyone even if it means "looking for a needle in a haystack."

23. Don't give up when frustrated

-----It's easy to get frustrated when
-----only a few students show up at your activity that you have planned and worked so hard on
-----no faculty or administration shows up--would I show up?
-----you really try to stay uninvolved with a situation and you get involved anyway.

-----can't get down or everything will fall apart

-----remember your successes, try to evaluate why this activity or program went wrong

24. In closing, be honest and persistent. Be yourself, don't quit trying, treat everyone the same.

No one can be perfect; but, we can strive to do our best. No one can have all of these characteristics; but, by mentioning them, maybe it will give you something to think about and work toward.